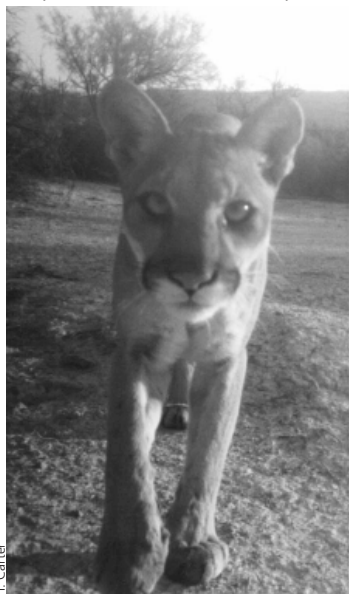


## Mountain Lion Country

IF BIG BEND HAD A SYMBOL, IT MIGHT WELL BE THE MOUNTAIN LION—the embodiment of freedom and wildness. Solitary and secretive, this mighty creature is the unquestioned lord of its natural world. As one of Big Bend's top predators, *Felis concolor*—"cat all of one color"—is vital in maintaining the park's biological diversity. Within the delicate habitats of the Chihuahuan Desert, mountain lions help balance herbivores (animals that eat plants) and vegetation. Research shows that cats help keep deer and javelina within the limits of their food resources. Without lions, the complex network of life in Big Bend would certainly be changed.

Encountering a mountain lion, however, can lead to conflicts in maintaining the balance between natural processes and visitor enjoyment and safety. Since the 1950s, there have been more than 800 sightings of mountain lions by visitors. While over 90 percent of these sightings were along park roadways, encounters along trails have also occurred. Since 1984, four lion and human encounters have resulted in attacks on people. In all cases, those attacked recovered from their injuries and the aggressive lions were killed, preventing them from playing out their important natural roles. The more we know about lions, and the less we seek an encounter, the better able we will be to make life easier for them and for us.

How much do you really know about this powerful and wild cat? Mountain lions live throughout the park, including the Chisos Mountains where they prefer to use trails. Your chances of encountering an aggressive lion are remote. What can you do to minimize the consequences of an encounter? Avoid hiking alone or at dusk or dawn. Watch children closely; never let them run ahead of you.



### NEVER RUN FROM A LION!

Do not crouch down; the lion has seen you long before you saw it.

Hold your ground, wave your hands, shout! If the lion behaves aggressively, throw stones.

Convince the lion that you are not prey and that you may be dangerous yourself.

If you have small children with you, pick them up and do all you can to appear large.

Report all lion sightings to a park ranger.

The lion's role is a part of the health and welfare of the entire ecosystem. Research and further human understanding of the cat's habits pave the way for conservation efforts in its behalf. As we discover more about the lion, we fear it less and appreciate it more. For many visitors, just seeing a track, or just knowing lions are out there, will be reward enough.

## Black Bears

THE RETURN OF BLACK BEARS TO BIG BEND National Park is a success story for both the bears and the park. Native to the Chisos Mountains, bears disappeared from this area during the pre-park settlement era. After an absence of several decades, bears began returning to the park from Mexico in the early 1990s.

Today, wildlife biologists estimate that up to 12 black bears may live in the park. Though they prefer the wooded Chisos Mountains, bears also range along the Rio Grande and through - out the desert, particularly when drought dries up their regular water sources in the mountains.

Black bears are omnivorous. They eat large amounts of nuts, fruits, sotol and yucca hearts, insects, and smaller quantities of eggs, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, honey, and carrion. Their strong sense of smell also leads them to human foods, and they can quickly open coolers, backpacks, and trash cans when enticed by food odors.

Bears normally avoid humans, but bears that learn to get food from human sources often become aggressive in their attempts to get more "people" food. When humans disobey the rules of both the park and nature by feeding bears, it is the bears that end up paying the ultimate price. Rangers may have to kill bears that lose their fear of people and

endanger humans in their attempts to get our food. Fortunately, Big Bend has not had to kill any bears, but some national parks destroy several bears each season; we hope that through educating visitors about proper

behavior in bear country, we can avoid this tragic outcome.

Big Bend has made it easy to keep edible items away from bears. Campers at the Chisos Basin Campground, at High Chisos backpacking sites, and at some primitive roadside campsites will find bearproof storage lockers for storing all edibles. Hard-sided vehicles are also suitable for storing edible items. All dumpsters in the Chisos Mountains developed areas are bearproof, as well. And remember, a bear's definition of an "edible" is far broader than ours; lock up sunscreen, skin

lotion, toothpaste, soap, and other toiletries whose odors might attract wildlife.

There really are no problem bears - only problem people. Carelessness can kill. Don't be responsible for the death of a bear. Follow the guidelines below. Pay close attention to the food storage rules posted in the Basin campground and on your backpacking permit. Your actions affect both Big Bend's wildlife and future park visitors.

With your help, bears and humans CAN live safely together in Big Bend National Park.



A small population of black bears lives here. Please help us keep them wild by storing all food items properly.

## Don't Call Me Pig!

FOR MANY VISITORS TO BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK, SEEING A JAVELINA (hav - uh - LEE - nuh) is a new experience.

These curious creatures, also known as collared peccaries, are only found in the United States in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They are covered with black, bristly hairs and generally weigh between 40 and 60 pounds. They usually travel in groups called bands that consist of 10-25 individuals. Peccaries have a highly developed sense of smell, but very poor vision.

Physically, javelinas resemble pigs, but in reality, they are not closely related to pigs at all and have been genetically distinct from them for millions of years. A closer look reveals several major differences between the two animals. Javelinas have 38 teeth; domestic pigs and wild boars have 44. The canine teeth of the javelina are short and straight, while those of pigs are longer and curved. Javelinas have a



Collared peccaries live throughout Big Bend

scent gland that they use to mark their territory that pigs do not have. Pigs sweat to keep themselves cool, but javelinas must instead cool themselves in available water sources or by staying in the shade.

A javelina's diet includes prickly pear cactus, grasses, mesquite beans, pinyon pine nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds. Unfortunately however, many javelinas now include human food as part of their diet. Every year we are seeing more and more campsites in the park raided by javelina. Although normally not aggressive, they can be when food is involved. Protect yourselves and our javelinas by properly storing all your food inside a vehicle or in the food storage lockers provided in the campgrounds. Do not leave coolers or food boxes unattended on picnic tables or in a tent. Flatten tents when you are away from your campsite. It is important that

javelinas and all park animals eat their natural food sources to stay healthy and safe. With your help, these unique animals can continue to thrive and thrill park visitors for years to come.

## Keep ALL Wildlife WILD

### In the Basin Campground

- Store food, beverages, trash, toiletries, pet food, and dishes in the bearproof storage locker provided at your site.
- Keep your campsite clean. Take trash and food scraps to a dumpster.
- Dump liquids in restroom utility sinks, not on the ground.
- Ice chests and coolers are not bear-proof; store them in your vehicle.

### Cyclists

- Use food storage lockers where provided.

### At the lodge

- Leave nothing outside your room, on the balcony, or on the porch.

### When hiking

- Never leave packs or food unattended.
- Avoid carrying odoriferous food and toiletries.
- Leave excess food and beverages in your trunk or food storage box
- Carry out all trash, including orange peels, cigarette butts, and left-over food.